

Entertainment Outlook

The rise and the fall of the Canadian empire



Weir's View
By Ian Weir
Thomson News Service

To be honest, I had made a solemn vow not to write a single word — let alone an entire column — about the Great Gretzky Trade.

Gentle Reader (I told myself) has spent the past week and-a-half reading about nothing else. Gentle Reader (bless him) deserves a break.

But this was before I realized the truth. And the truth — as countless other commentators have made clear — is the transfer of Wayne Gretzky to the L.A. Kings is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to Canada.

Apparently, the trade has shattered our sense of identity as a country, stripped us of our stature abroad, and just generally reduced 120 years of nation-building to rubble. And if your job is penning frivolous newspaper columns, these are issues you simply have to address.

To begin with, of course, it appeared the only real consequence of the trade was to convince hundred of thousands of Edmontonians that they want to

lynch Peter Pocklington. And lynching Peter wouldn't quite constitute the collapse of Canada — although it would understandably dismay Mrs. Pocklington.

(Or, on the other hand, perhaps it wouldn't. After all, Mrs. Pocklington is presumably an Oiler fan, too. And perhaps husbands who trade Wayne Gretzky spend an awful lot of nights sleeping on the couch.)

But the media soon opened our eyes to the wide-ranging and ghastly ramifications. Newspaper editors were among the first to realize the Trade might drive us all into psychotherapy.

Two days after the event, I came across an article in which a psychologist was asked to assess the impact on the national psyche. Apparently, the loss of Gretzky to L.A. will reinforce our subconscious belief that we are poor country-cousins whose few treasures are bound to be snatched away by the greedy and all-powerful Americans.

As such, we are now bitterly lamenting the fact we let them find out about Wayne. If only we had safeguarded him wisely, by keeping him in a sock under the mattress.

This led to the theory that the Gretzky deal may turn Canadians against free trade. According to the experts — i.e., those who write newspaper columns — we have been shocked into realizing the Yankee traders are bent on buying our souls with their filthy dollars.

Across the nation, we are led to believe, distraught Canadians are now muttering: "We woulda let 'em have

the water. We woulda given 'em the oil. But no — they hadda go and buy Wayne."

And then came the biggest blow of all. The Globe and Mail's Moscow correspondent has revealed the loss of Gretzky means the loss of Canada's credibility in Russian eyes.

Russian doormen, the correspondent wrote, would invariably beam with delight when confronted with a Canadian exclaiming: "Kanada — Gretzky!"

But that's all down the tubes, now. Presumably, Russian doormen are now looking with stony contempt upon The Globe's Moscow correspondent. Worse yet, they may even be greeting him with the exclamation: "Kanada — Howie Meeker!" It's a wonder Pocklington can sleep at all.

Well. At a time of such national crisis, only a fool could try to be sunny and optimistic. Still, before we all decide we have nothing left to live for, there are a couple of thoughts we might try to keep in mind.

To begin with, much of the commentary about the Trade has centred on its devastating impact on poor Edmonton. That city, we are told, is shattered. Which raises the simple question: does this really bother you?

Consider, further, the fact the immediate effect of the Trade is to guarantee the Oilers may never win another Stanley Cup. Which raises a second question: isn't this a marvellous thought?

I don't want to sound too puritanical, here. I will stop short of saying it is vile and sinful for a team to win the Cup ev-

ery year. I will even stop short of saying it is wicked to root for such a team.

But I will point out that the Bible stresses the meek shall inherit the earth — which comes pretty close to a Divine injunction to root for the Maple Leafs instead.

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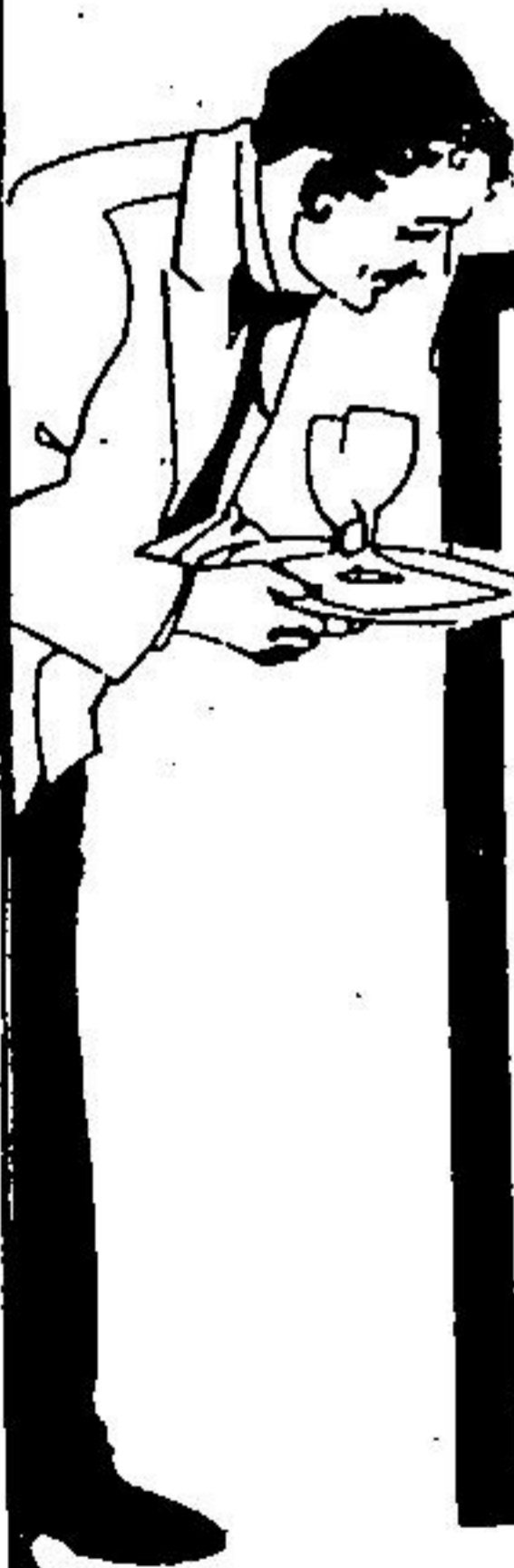
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